

The Irish Theosophist.

THE FOUNTAINS OF YOUTH.

I HEARD that a strange woman, dwelling on the western coast, who had the repute of healing by faery power, said a little before she died, "There's a cure for all things in the well at Ballykeele": and I know not why at first, but her words lingered with me and repeated themselves again and again, and by degrees to keep fellowship with the thought they enshrined came more antique memories, all I had heard or dreamed of the Fountains of Youth; for I could not doubt, having heard these fountains spoken of by people like herself, that her idea had a druid ancestry. Perhaps she had bent over the pool until its darkness grew wan and bright and troubled with the movements of a world within and the agitations of a tempestuous joy; or she had heard, as many still hear, the wild call to "Come away," from entreating lips and flame-encircled faces, or was touched by the star-tipped fingers, and her heart from the faery world came never back again to dwell as before at ease in this isle of grey mists and misty sunlight. These things are not fable only, for Ireland is still a land of the gods, and in out of the way places we often happen on wonderlands of romance and mystic beauty. I have spoken to people who have half parted from their love for the world in a longing for the pagan paradise of Tir-na-nóg, and many who are outwardly obeisant to another religion are altogether pagan in their hearts, and Meave the Queen of the Western Host is more to them than Mary Queen of Heaven. I was told of this Meave that lately she was seen in vision by a peasant, who made a poem on her, calling her "The Beauty of all Beauty": and the man who told me this of his friend had himself seen the jetted fountains of fire-mist winding up in spiral whirls to the sky, and he too had heard of the Fountains of Youth.

The natural longing in every heart that its youth shall not perish

makes one ponder and sigh over this magical past when youth, ecstasy, and beauty welled from a bountiful nature at the sung appeal of her druid children holding hand in hand around the sacred cairn. Our hearts remember :

*A wind blows by us fleeting
Along the reedy strand :
And sudden our hearts are beating
Again in the druid-land.*

*All silver-pale, enchanted,
The air-world lies on the hills,
And the fields of light are planted
With the dawn-frail daffodils.*

*The yellow leaves are blowing
The hour when the wind-god weaves,
And hides the stars and their glowing
In a mist of daffodil leaves.*

*We stand in glimmering whiteness,
Each face like the day-star fair,
And rayed about in its brightness
With a dawn of daffodil air.*

*And through each white robe gleaming,
And under each snow-white breast,
Is a golden dream-light streaming
Like eve through an opal west.*

*One hand to the heart, another
We raise to the dawn on high ;
For the sun in the heart is brother
To the sun-heart of the sky.*

*A light comes rising and falling,
As ringed in the druid choir
We sing to the sun-god, calling
By his name of yellow fire.*

*The touch of the dew-wet grasses,
The breath of the dawn-cool wind,
With the dawn of the god-light passes
And the world is left behind.*

*We drink of a fountain giving
The joy of the gods, and then—
The Land of the Ever-living
Has passed from us again.*

*Passed far beyond all saying,
For memory only weaves
On a silver dawn outraying
A cloud of daffodil leaves.*

And not indirectly through remembrance only, but when touched from within by the living beauty, the soul, the ancient druid in man, renews its league with the elements; and sometimes as the twilight vanishes and night lays on the earth her tender brow, the woods, the mountains, the clouds that tinted like seraphim float in the vast, and the murmur of water, wind and trees, melt from the gaze and depart from the outward ear and become internal reveries and contemplations of the spirit, and are no more separate but are part of us. Yet these vanishings from us and movements in worlds not realized, leave us only more thirsty to drink of a deeper nature where all things are dissolved in ecstasy, and heaven and earth are lost in God. So we turn seeking for the traces of that earlier wisdom which guided man into the Land of Immortal Youth, and assuaged his thirst at a more brimming flood at the Feast of Age, the banquet which Manannán the Danann king instituted in the haunt of the Fire-god, and whoever partook knew thereafter neither weariness, decay, nor death.

These mysteries, all that they led to, all that they promised for the spirit of man, are opening to-day for us in clear light, their fabulous distance lessens, and we hail these kingly ideals with as intense a trust and with more joy, perhaps, than they did who were born in those purple hours, because we are emerging from centuries indescribably meagre and squalid in their thought, and every new revelation has for us the sweetness of sunlight to one after the tears and sorrow of a prison-house. The well at Ballykeele is, perhaps, a humble starting-point for the contemplation of such mighty mysteries; but here where the enchanted world lies so close it is never safe to say what narrow path may not lead through a visionary door into Moy Argatnel, the Silver Cloudland of Manannán, where

“Feet of white bronze
Glitter through beautiful ages.”

The Danann king with a quaint particularity tells Bran in the poem from which these lines are quoted, that

“There is a wood of beautiful fruit
Under the prow of thy little skiff.”

What to Bran was a space of pale light was to the eye of the god a land of pure glory, Ildathach the Many-coloured Land, rolling with rivers of golden light and dropping with dews of silver flame. In another poem the Brugh by the Boyne, outwardly a little hillock, is thus described :

“Look, and you will see it is the palace of a god.”

Perhaps the mystic warriors of the Red Branch saw supernatural pillars blazoned like the sunset, and entered through great doors and walked in lofty halls with sunset-tinted beings speaking a more beautiful wisdom than earth's. And they there may have seen those famous gods who had withdrawn generations before from visible Eiré: Manannán the dark blue king, Lu Lamfáda with the sunrise on his brow and his sling, a wreath of rainbow flame, coiled around him, the Goddess Dana in ruby brilliance, Nuada silver-handed, the Dagda with floating locks of light shaking from him radiance and song, Angus Oge, around whose head the ever-winged birds made music, and others in whose company these antique heroes must have felt the deep joy of old companionship renewed, for were not the Danann hosts men of more primeval cycles become divine and movers in a divine world. In the Brugh too was a fountain, to what uses applied the mystical imagination working on other legends may make clearer.

The Well of Connla, the parent fountain of many streams visible and invisible, was the most sacred well known in ancient Ireland. It lay itself below deep waters at the source of the Shannon, and these waters which hid it were also mystical, for they lay between earth and the Land of the Gods. Here, when stricken suddenly by an internal fire, the sacred hazels of wisdom and inspiration unfolded at once their leaves and blossoms and their scarlet fruit, which falling upon the waters dyed them of a royal purple; the nuts were then devoured by Fintann the Salmon of Knowledge, and the wisest of the druids partook also. This was perhaps the greatest of the mysteries known to the ancient Gael, and in the bright phantasmagoria conjured up there is a wild beauty which belongs to all their tales. The suddenly arising forests of golden fire, trees whose roots drew honey sweetness from the dreams of a remote divinity, the scarlet nuts tossing on the purple flood, the bright immortals glancing hither and thither, are pictures left of some mystery we may not now uncover, though to-morrow may reveal it, for the dawn-lights are glittering everywhere in Ireland.

Perhaps the strange woman who spoke of the well at Ballykeele, and others like her, may know more about these fountains than the legend-seekers who so learnedly annotate their tales. They may have drunken in dreams of the waters at Connla's well, for many go to the Tir-na-nóg in sleep, and some are said to have remained there, and only a vacant form is left behind without the light in the eyes which marks the presence of a soul. I make no pretence of knowledge concerning the things which underlie their simple speech, but to me there seems to be for ever escaping from legend and folk-tale, from word and custom, some breath of a world of beauty I sigh for but am not nigh to as these are. I think if that strange woman could have found a voice for what was in her heart she would have completed her vague oracle somewhat as I have done :

*There's a cure for all things in the well at Ballykeele,
Where the scarlet cressets o'erhang from the rowan trees ;
There's a joy-breath blowing from the Land of Youth I feel,
And earth with its heart at ease.*

*Many and many a sun-bright maiden saw the enchanted land
With star-faces glimmer up from the druid wave :
Many and many a pain of love was soothed by a faery hand
Or lost in the love it gave.*

*When the quiet with a ring of pearl shall wed the earth
And the scarlet berries burn dark by the stars in the pool,
Oh, it's lost and deep I'll be in the joy-breath and the mirth,
My heart in the star-heart cool.*

Æ.

THE FOUNDING OF EMAIN MACHA.

(Concluded from p. 205.)

SHE passed through the hall and entered her chariot—the chariot which was only used when some great deed was to be accomplished. It was made by the ancient smith Culain, whose home was in Slieve Fuad, and who was so old that the valley-dwelling people said before the mountain rose there Culain had his forge, and some said he was the fashioner of the mountain; and half they dreaded the wise Culain and his power, half they loved to have him there, though seldom seen by them. When he built the war-car for Macha he caused fiery birds and winged serpents to ever circle around it and serve as guardians for its mistress, and often in the quiet night men heard the dread singing of the spirits and turned away in trembling from the doors of the chariot-house. He had also given to Macha two gigantic horses, not of mortal breed, one silver-white and shining, the other black as the chafer which flies when dusk is falling on hill and plain. Now as the Ultonians saw Macha going forth alone, save for the charioteer, and heard the singing of the birds and the low music proceeding from the enchanted chariot, and saw the impatient restlessness of the magic horses, they said among themselves that surely Macha was going forth to make some secret conquest.

Swiftly the horses galloped over the bridge spanning the deep foss, more swiftly than a flying bird they travelled through the hours of the night. As they passed by scattered hamlets and isolated wattled houses, the dwellers therein, hearing the resounding noise of the fast-going chariot, and the multitudinous voices and the whirr as of many wings rustling through the air, said the gods were abroad, and turned on their couches and covered up their faces, for these hamlet-dwelling people were only labourers of the field and herd-keepers, and did not possess the high courage which distinguished the warriors of Eiré. Even the elements were not at peace, for high overhead the dark rolling clouds clashed together, while the serpent lightnings shot to the earth and flickered on the green and gold of the chariot and the ruddy head of the wondrous queen. And ever as Macha journeyed the demons of the chariot sang joyfully and triumphantly, and luminous shapes circled round her and unfolded before her eyes visions of times and events yet unborn. She saw the Ultonians of that distant time, a heroic race, giving birth to heroes, and had sure knowledge of her re-appearance among them to battle for Ulla and the preservation of its

ancient glory. Other and greater visions were made clear to her in the darkness and thunder-crashing of the night; then, at the brightening of the morning, all vanished from Macha's sight, leaving her half sad, half joyful, that the future held so much still to be accomplished.

Now the singing of the war-demons grew louder and Macha heard a warning and ominous note in it. Absorbed in thought and in the contemplation of the beauty of the glowing clouds shining through the dark tracery of the forest trees, she was unaware of her nearness to the *dûn* of Dithorba's sons. Looking up, she saw them standing on the high wall, and one of them preparing to sling, but she only held her shield more firmly before the charioteer and slightly smiled. He slung, and the great stone smashed and flew all around, not even indenting her shield. Faster and faster the pebbles struck upon the bronze-ribbed shield, but Macha only smiled, and terror filled the hearts of the princes, for rather would they have seen her with fierce contracted brows than with softly-smiling lips and gentle eyes. Then one of the brothers said: "Let us fight as the ancient Fomors fought the Dananns long ago." So they summoned the dark evil spirits to their side and sent them forth against Macha, and the air was full of moving horrors and slimy creeping monsters that strove to encircle her and paralyze her noble heart with fear. But in Macha awoke the gleaming dragon of might, and before it their power departed and they returned foiled to their masters.

When Macha was near the closed gates she fitted an iron bolt to her sling, and so great was the strength of that bolt that it broke the doors in two and the horses and chariot crashed through on to the lawn surrounding the *dûn*, where the princes stood in sullen silence. As Macha alighted from her chariot one of them in sudden rage rushed forward and would have struck her with his spear, but she glanced at him with her clear eyes and his arm fell powerless by his side. Another moment she held the glance of all, then the only will they knew was the will of Macha. Now the spirits of the chariot sang softly and sweetly; the last of the Fomorian enchanters were conquered, Ulla was free of her enemies, all *Eiré* was at peace.

Macha tarried there but a day, then eastward and northward turned, first setting fire to the *dûn*, for she said evil demons dwelt there that only fire could destroy. So, standing before the *dûn*, she waved her hands, and with each waving flames leaped from the ground and encircled the *dûn*; soon of that giant dwelling only ashes would remain, and in a few months the young green corn would be growing where Dithorba's sons had vainly planned.

Quickly the horses traversed Eiré on the homeward journey, and now Macha noticed the beauty of the fluttering oak-leaves, bronze-red and golden in the sunlight, while the larches waved their feathery plumes over her head and bowed to her in greeting, as though they too were her subjects and knew and loved her well. A little wren flew from a branch and rested on the edge of her brooch, while from his high place in the blue heavens a lark descended and sang in her ear, for Macha understood the song of the birds and the speech of all nature as well as she comprehended the subtlest meanings of men.

It was again sunset when the watchers of Macha's dún beheld her chariot emerge from the woodland road and rapidly cross the plain. They saw, too, the giant sons of Dithorba lying passive in it, while Macha, calm and still-eyed, watched a strangely-shaped blue mist that rested on Slieve Fuad. Then they ran hastily and threw open the gates for the chariot to pass through; and Kimbath came from the hall, speaking no word of greeting to Macha, for their love and regard for each was such that they needed not the speech of mortals to express their gladness and joy one in another. Silently he held her hand as she stepped from the chariot and gave the captive princes into the charge of some of the Ultonians; then followed her to the grianan, for she was very tired and said she would rest for a time.

At the long table that night there was much merriment, and the laughter of the warriors echoed and rang amid the high rafters, for it made their hearts light to see the Olnemacian princes, downcast and quiet, sitting among them; and many times the bronze cups were filled and emptied of the sparkling mead as they drank to the beautiful queen. But when the evening was somewhat advanced Eochaidh, one of the Ultonian chiefs, arose and spake of the doom which should be the Olnemacians:

"For," he said, "they have plotted against you, our queen; they would have destroyed the peace and prosperity of Ulla and the Ultonians, and through that discord would have fallen on the whole of Eiré. They would have broken the wise laws you have made for the government of our island race; and the hamlet-dwelling people, the workers in forests and fields, without those laws would be lost and helpless as straying lambs on a dark and stormy night, for these people have no controlling or governing power in themselves, but require a wise and strong and oftentimes stern ruler. The doom for those who break certain of our laws is death, and that the sons of Dithorba have done. Therefore we demand these captives, O Macha, that the doom of death by the cord hanging from the rafters may be theirs, so that

seeing their bodies none other will dare to disobey the laws or plot the destruction of Ulla."

The listening Macha's eyes brightened with a sudden gleam of anger at Eochaid's demand, then grew soft and meditative as she replied:

"I will not give these princes to you, Eochaidh. My reign shall not be made unrighteous by the death of captives not taken in the battle. When they were prisoners before I saved them from the death which might lawfully have been meted to them, exiling them instead, for not willingly would I deal death to anyone. But the Fomor spirit they inherit prompted them to use the Fomor arts, thus causing me to journey to the west and bring them hither to avert the evil which, from my palace here, I foresaw would surely arise in Eiré if they remained longer in exile and matured their plans. Now I will enslave these princes, and they shall build a mighty dún for me where the oak-trees make their music to the westward, and this dún shall be the chief city of the north for ever. From it a light shall shine over Eiré, and sometimes shine unseen, save by a few in whom the ancient heroes dwell and whom the gods protect. I foresee, too, that long hence I shall come again and dwell in the dún I will now have built, and from thence shall do battle for the Ultonians, last lingerers of a druid tribe. After that the night will fall on our island, and so deep will be the darkness of the night that even the gods will be forgotten, though they will still remain forgetful of their people, then a scattered and wandering race. Yet out of the darkness I see another dawn-light breaking over Eiré, and the forge of Culain sending long sun-like rays over all the land; and from remote and secret places the gods breathing forth their radiant spirit into the hearts of a people long shrouded in the mists of vain imaginings and uncomprehended teachings."

There was silence in the vast pillared hall as Macha, with dreaming eyes and downbent head, descended from her seat and slowly passed to her grianan. And as she walked many there saw a luminous beautiful presence floating above her, enwreathed in ruby and violet mists, with delicate everchanging blooms of fire crowning the head and springing from the heart; and with each blossoming of a flower a sweet, low music filled the hall, so that the warriors' hearts became gentle and tender even towards those who would have wrecked the peace of Ulla. Still in the same deep silence they listened as Kimbaoth spoke a few words ere he too left the hall.

"Chiefs and warriors of Ulla, surely it is the Mor Reega who is with us, and yet it is Macha. We are children in wisdom, for unknown

to us the deathless queen was moving among us day by day, holding herself as one of the least wise of the people of Eiré. Let us ponder over the ways of the gods, for indeed their mysteries are not known to us."

With unrestful minds the Ultonians sought their carven couches or talked in little groups and with whispering voices under the trees on the lawn. The visions they saw disquieted them, for they had not the clear knowledge of Macha concerning the world which was sometimes made visible to them, and as they conversed together sorrowfully confessed their ignorance where Macha was wise. Then in thought they travelled backward to the time of their oldest traditions, which spoke of mortals journeying to the immortals and returning hither with unbounded wisdom; and some of the heroes wished that Macha would lead their faltering footsteps over the mystic waters into the shining Otherworld, for they were suddenly tired of battles and feastings and the chase, and many strange yearnings possessed their hearts.

For a few days Macha rested in seeming quietude in her dún, for she had much to perform that was known to only a few of the Ultonians. But one evening she bade the chief warriors of Ulla prepare to accompany her on the morrow, when she would mark the foundations of the dún which would be their future home, and which the Olnemacian princes would build. With the rising of the sun the Ultonians and the sons of Dithorba were ready and waiting for the queen, and though they heard the singing of the invisible birds and the whirr of the serpents' wings round the magical chariot, they heeded them not, for their thoughts were centred on Macha and the deed they were to witness. Then Macha—white-robed and purple-brattaed—and Kimbaoth entered the golden-green and gleaming chariot, and drove a few miles northward and westward of Slievè Fuad, and there the queen bade the Ultonians stop their chariots, while swiftly she proceeded to trace the foundation of the dún which should henceforth be known as Emain Macha. And wherever the ponderous wheels of the chariot rolled a river of fire followed after, springing up from the brown earth furrows. In the centre of the almost perfect circle thus formed Macha traced another circle round a green and purple fire-fountain welling from the ground, and in the building on the smaller circle she said the people of Eiré would be taught the ancient wisdom, and there the immortal gods would also come. But amazement and awe fell on the Ultonians as they watched the waves of flame roll along the ground, and saw the strange and wondrous beings accompanying their queen—beings that were seldom seen in Eiré, though ever abiding there. And

when Macha had laid the foundation of fire she called the sons of Dithorba to her and gave them directions for the building of the *dûn*: how the walls were to be of oak, the roof of hazel and the doors of yew, inlaid with the white findruiney and set with jewels. Willingly the princes heeded her words, for though they had plotted against her while she was yet unknown to them, since they had been her prisoners they had learned to love her, not because of her beauty only, but also by reason of the gentleness of her heart and the subtlety of her mind.

Scarcely had she ceased speaking to the princes when Art, who had been gazing before him with wonder-filled eyes, unwrapped the small tympan he carried and dreamily struck its gold and silver chords, then began to chant concerning the things he saw. He sang of the magic-working smith Culain, a god of most ancient days; of the Ioldana, who came with his sling of light and his white-fire hound; of the son of Lir, with the roaring of innumerable seas and the surging foam around him; of the Great Father with his harp, whose sweet music entranced the Fomors at the time they sought to conquer the Danann race, and of Angus his son, the singing of whose birds filled the hearts of men and maidens with a faery love. He sang, too, of Nuada Airgid-Lámh, the silver-handed magician; of Ogma, the dragon-crested warrior-god, with his spear of blue-green flame, and many others. Then he chanted the *Mor Reega*, in her ruby and purple splendour standing by Queen Macha's side, with her silver robe lightly girdled by an iridescent serpent and the mystic trefoil shining at her breast. And he had foreknowledge of much to come, for he sang of the *dûn* when it would stand in finished beauty; of silver trees with jewelled fruits glowing in the fountain light, and of Macha teaching the people of Eiré to journey to the Hy-Breasal, the Shining City of the ancient Gael. Then, with still more wondering eyes, he cried out that the gods were waving shadowy hands and beckoning him away, and with one last lingering touch of his thin white fingers across the chords he dropped the tympan and sank back into the chariot. He was glad to go, for he was old and weary and life had many sorrows for him, and when the gods call no mortal shall say nay.

Macha returned to her *dûn* for a season, leaving the Olnemacian princes, with some Ultonians as guards, to hew the giant trees and fashion the *dûn* according to her desire, and this they did. Though the length of the *dûn* was more than two miles, and the breadth of it well-nigh as great, and though it was the close of summer then, ere the ash-trees were in leaf again Emain Macha was in readiness for the queen and her household. And for many years Macha lived and

reigned over Eiré, and the people became wise in the wisdom of the queen, who, as Art had foreseen, taught them to converse with the gods and to traverse the shining waters leading to the Otherworld. During those last years war was laid aside, and sorrow and grief were unknown in the isle until Macha—not by death, but through her magic power—returned to the land from which she came only to teach anew to the children of Eiré the paths leading to the immortals.

It is long ago, and the mists of time have enshrouded the antique queen, yet she came again, as she had prophesied, when Eiré needed her; and even to-day, whoever seeks for her may find her in her mountain-home in the west, where she dwells with other great gods of the Gael.

LAON.

ROBERT BROWNING.

V.—HIS ART.

It is a truism of criticism so familiar as to be continually forgotten, that all scriptures should be interpreted by the same spirit which gave them forth. To remember this would save some critics much labour and their readers much ineptitude. Thus, if a man please to paint commonplace life as meanly as mean men live it, there is no valid ground for faulting him because his writing is not idyllic. With his object we may have quarrel, but not with his method if it fulfil his object. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that Browning regarded poetry as his true life-work, and that the mission of poetry, in his view of his art, was the exaltation of the real life of man, the life within. This, therefore, is the test whereby we must try him, and when we turn to look at his verse from the standpoint of art our main concern is to decide whether his labour, if admitted to be within the province of art, was faithfully performed. Now I take it that the mode of appeal which distinguishes art from the other mental pursuits of man is in the emphasis which it lays upon beauty, and that the kind of beauty which we should look for first at the hands of a poet who comes to us with a plea for soul must be beauty of an inward and visionary kind. We may freely admit against such work as Browning's much complaint of turgid phrasing and turbulent arrangement of uncouth rhythms and impossible rhymes; obscurity of diction and truculent defiance of prosody; and yet claim that of the essentials of his art, the power of portraying the soul of things, the poet has real mastery and has surprised life of

some of its most beautiful secrets, and made life the more beautiful for his seeing; teaching us through his vision the true art of living, which is to strike the note of deepest beauty that we know, and, having struck it, to hold it until we learn a deeper. Such art is Browning's great heritage to us, and in this relation all mere technical criticism recedes to the lower rank of thought to which it belongs. He was the "minister of healing to his time" (to use the beautiful phrase in which John Stuart Mill sums up the influence of Wordsworth's genius, and reveals the tenderness and delicate sensibility of his own great nature), and nobly was his ministry fulfilled.

"Pressing the brain which too much thought expands,
Back to its proper size again, and smoothing
Distortion down till every nerve had soothing,
And all lay quiet, happy and suppressed."

If we could once learn truly the secret of such healing,

"How soon all worldly wrong would be repaired!
I think how I should view the earth and skies
And sea, when once again my brow was bared
After thy healing, with such different eyes,
A world as God has made it! All is beauty:
And knowing this is love, and love is duty.
What further may be sought for or declared?"*

The simplicity of such world-revealings is perhaps half their charm, for the real wonders of nature are precious, not through unaccustomedness, but through that gracious nearness to the deepest heart in us, whose very familiarity lends a charm to common things and tinges life with ideal beauty.

"As life wanes, all its care and strife and toil
Seem strangely valueless, while the old trees
Which grew by our youth's home, the waving mass
Of climbing plants heavy with bloom and dew,
The morning swallows with their songs like words,
All these seem clear and only worth our thoughts."

And who has taught us this so convincingly as him from whom these words are borrowed, and to whom art was ever nature steeped in the sunshine of spirit?

To claim that Browning has surprised life of beautiful secrets, and

* Browning's "Guardian Angel," one of the most winsome and healing lyrics in English verse.

has showered them about us to be ours if we will stop to gather them, is to claim that he is an artist in the highest sense, carving out of the world-stuff the wonders it enfolds; but he who succeeds in great tasks may of course fail in small ones, and the critics are at liberty to cull crude phrases and indistinct images, false rhymes and unmelodious cadences, if they please, and point to these as grave flaws in technique. Even admitting all that is involved in such dexterous fault-finding, we may still assert confidently that there is a considerable remainder of work artistically great accomplished by the author of "Misconceptions," "A Star," "Transformation," "May and Death," "Home Thoughts from Abroad," and "Amphibian," to name a few of the poems which are most penetrated by his piercing and lingering quality of beauty; we may point to passages and phrases of poignant power and brooding graciousness, such lightning word-flashes as:

"Stung by the splendour of sudden thought."

"God and all that chivalry of His

The soldier saints who row on row burn upward each to his point
of bliss."

"How can we guard our unbelief

Make it bear fruit to us?"

Fancies illuminated as summer sunshine like:

"Music is like a voice,

A low voice, calling fancy as a friend,
To the green woods in the gay summer-time:
And she fills all the way with dancing shapes
Which have made painters pale, and they go on
Till stars look at them and winds call to them
As they leave life's path for the twilight world
Where the dead gather."

"Autumn has come like spring returned to us
Won from her girlishness."

Pictures luminous as autumn moonlight, like this of John dying
in the desert:

"Only he did—not so much wake as turn—
And smile a little as a sleeper does
If any dear one call him, touch his face,
And smiles and loves but will not be disturbed."

Thoughts radiant as clusters of winter stars—such as strew
"Pauline," that magnificent though broken arc in the heaven of
poetry; these, for instance:

"The blackthorn boughs
White with coming buds like the bright side of a sorrow."

"Old woods which lie quivering
In light, as something lieth half of life
Before God's foot, waiting a wondrous change."

If it be denied that the creator of these images was a great artist in verse, the denial must be made from a standpoint which is quite out of relation to any standard which Browning himself would have accepted, and which is alien too to that universal conception of the true significance of poetry which Mr. Sharp has given us in his wonderful phrase, "perfect poetry is the deathless part of mortal beauty."

Of course it will be objected that fragments torn from their sequence, like those quoted above, do not prove much. It takes many pines to make a forest. Nor would longer extracts be more satisfactory, though I cannot forbear citing "Memorabilia," and quoting at least one stanza (I would like to quote all six) of "Garden Fancies—The Flower's Name":

"This flower she stopped at, finger on lip.
Stooped over in doubt as settling its claim
Till she gave me with pride to make no slip
Its soft meandering Spanish name.
What a name? Was it lover's praise?
Speech half asleep or song half awake?
I must learn Spanish one of these days
Only for that slow sweet name's sake."

Yet along with the flawless beauty of this poem, of "Transformation" and others named with it above, it must be granted that in some of the longer poems—notably "Sordello"—there are far too many inversions, parentheses and many subordinate sentences, many harsh lines, a copious use of problematical pronouns and a great deal of startling license both in rhyme and structure; and if a reader who finds—as I do—that Browning touches him to finer issues than any other poet chooses to worship his master's foibles because they are his master's, he must be content to allow the world to censure them as foibles all the same. That much, however, of the censure which has passed as Browning criticism, especially in the earlier days of his authorship, is unjust no one who has caught the spirit of the great singer's music can doubt. Is it that failure to apprehend his spiritual concepts of life has irritated those who came to Browning for intellectuality, and found not even that?

Mr. Sharp, in his delightful little book *Robert Browning* ("Great Writers' Series"), compares the poet to Wagner, and although such inviting parallels are dangerous, not least because of their ease and apparent inevitableness, I think this comparison is capable of being worked out in some detail. Both artists felt that they were the bearers of a message, and both found that to realize their purpose they must create a new mode. One note of the new mode was that, whilst taking as their masters those whose work had been most transcendental in their respective arts (in Wagner's case Beethoven, in Browning's Shelley), it should modify, to suit the needs of a more strenuous age, the artistic expression of this transcendental spirit which had haunted the works of the authors of *Lohengrin* and of "Epipsychidion." The modifications of the older modes were significantly and strikingly similar. They lay largely in the abrupt use of antithesis, climax and discord. I do not know if these precise notes of these two artist-mystics have been previously pointed out, for I am ignorant of the bibliography of both of them; but I must venture to emphasize the importance, when criticising Browning's art, of keeping well in view the fact that frequently, when he writes turgidly, he wishes the reader to catch in his incadenced phrasing the rush of turgid emotions; and that when he is discordant he wishes us to feel that the rhythm of balanced harmony which is the normal expression of thought and feeling has been disturbed by the presence of dramatic passion. This dissonance, in its contrast to the even excellence with which he can work when his aims are lyrical, enhances the value of his harmonies, and shows a deeper artistic sense than his critics often comprehend. Indeed in his use of light and shade he seems to me to be distinctly a creative spirit in art; and if Wagner has given us, as his admirers claim, the lead to the music of the future, I believe that Browning has done the same thing for poetry, and for the same reasons, first because of his spiritual comprehension of his art and because of his power to subject it to the moodful varying needs of both lyrical and dramatic emotion. It may be claimed that Wagner in his music has run a wider gamut than Browning in his verse, the musician lends his art so readily both to triumph and to tears; in some cases (notably the marvellous and haunting "Pilgrim's Chant" in *Tannhauser*) making the very same music motifs subserve the two purposes. Browning, on the other hand, with his sense of power, sometimes seems too robust to paint perfectly the more delicate and subtle of the expressions which dwell upon the face of grief, until suddenly one remembers "James Lee's Wife," and suspends judgment.

One difference between music and poetry which makes the parallel between the two masters difficult to draw arises from the different material in which they work. Words are first of all the exponents of thought, later and less the revealers of emotion. Musical sound, on the other hand, is the readiest interpreter of the human heart, and hardly, as yet, a mode of intellectual transmission. The images of poetry are therefore more definite in their appeal than the imaginings of music; less subtle, less delicate, less deep, less rich emotionally, and it is therefore in his hold on the concrete that the poet as artist is apt to be finally judged. Enough has been said, I hope, to show that in Browning the feeling for concrete perfection, the Greek spirit, was finely developed. If further quotation were necessary in proof of this many passages of chastened beauty might be chosen; this from "Pauline," for example, where the speaker tells his dreams of beauty:

"They came to me in my first dawn of life,
Which passed alone with ancient wisest books
All halo-girt with fancies of my own;
And I myself went with the tale—a god
Wandering after beauty; or a giant
Standing vast in the sunset; an old hunter
Talking with gods, or a high-crested chief
Sailing with troops of friends to Tenedos.
I tell you, naught has been so clear
As the place, the time, the fashion of those lives.
I had not seen a work of lofty art,
Nor woman's beauty nor sweet nature's face;
Yet, I say, never morn broke clear as those
On the dim clustered isles in the blue sea,
The deep groves and white temples and wet caves.
And nothing ever will surprise me now—
Who stood beside the naked Swift-footed,
Who bound my forehead with Proserpine's hair."

But the feeling for concrete beauty in its most definite shapes is not, I think, the highest gift art brings us. Above the Greek spirit I must claim place for the Celtic, with its wavering impulses of unrevealed emotion, its snatches of incompleted music, its hovering sense of a mystical and brooding beauty; never vouchsafed for too much asking, but flashed on the beholder from afar in broken fragments, like moonlight glancing on a wind-stirred wave, or sunshine shimmering on a sea-bird's wing stayed for an instant in its upward flight. It is in

this mode, with its suggestions of a beauty too great to be enchained within any forms of art, that Browning seems to me to have done his best work. He himself, in "Old Pictures in Florence," has contrasted Greek with mediæval art to the praise of the latter, whose very imperfection is to him a proof of deeper insight and higher vision, and of inlook towards larger realms of soul than are as yet incorporated in the spiritual life of man. Whether the contrast is itself just and conclusive or not there can, I think, be no doubt that the suggestiveness of fragmentary beauty is more potent in its influence on the spirit than any sense of complete perfection. Progression, eternal conquest, infinite attainment—these are the ideals of inspiration whether in art or in life; the unopened floret and the crescent moon are fitter symbols of the eternal beauty than any maturer product of nature. It is certainly in his touch upon this eternal beauty that we discern most clearly the meaning of Browning's life-work; his devotion to that many-sided spiritual life whose hints of a greater truth and beauty than we can express is the surest proof of its reality. Not form, then, but spirit which informs it, is the lesson of Browning's art:

"Hold on, hope hard in the subtle thing,
That's spirit; tho' cloistered fast soar free."

Not any external semblance of loveliness, but the living breathing spirit of beauty is the vision he would give to men; and from his efforts to do this there has resulted, if not perfect art, certainly the greatest achievement which the modern world has seen in English verse:

"Shall to produce form out of unshaped stuff
Be art—and further, to evoke a soul
From form be nothing? This new soul is his."

Technical faults may abound in his verse, though some of us do not much care to make them our quest; but for the bursting of the sudden flowers of beauty in unsuspected places where life has apparently lain barren; for touches of rare beauty pregnant with promise, hinting at a grandeur which can never be caught in the meshes of the net of art; thoughts, hopes, fancies, "which break through language and escape"; for the full, rich ardour of the artist-faith—faith in the unfolding of the human heart, faith in the full free spiritual efflorescence of man in life and in art, which is both the reflection and the inspirer of life, where shall we find a greater among the poets of the modern world?

OMAR.

A STUDENT'S NOTES.

THOUGHT, like the eternal pulsations of the ever-living light, proceeds from the fountain of its essence in the divine consciousness of the great Oversoul. This soul directs its forces through all the seven worlds of archetypal manifestation, and by their reflection discloses in objective form the paradigmatic emblems that we call objective worlds. These worlds are the recipients of all the force that can be manifested to our senses, and are the collective creation of the primal divine thought. This thought reflects itself again in all the processes of nature, and through nature discloses the avenues by which the Ego can reach by progressive steps the absolute consciousness from which it started. The terms of its delay in every given plane are defined by its capacity to distinguish its own relations to that plane, and conform its desires to a translation of its experiences into the next higher plane, thus carrying with it the collective skandhas of all events; and thereby combining the sum total of its comprehension of truth. This process is one of difficulty and danger, for the pitfalls of desire open wide along the path and drag one down unless one keeps one's gaze firmly fixed on the only reality and does not listen to the sweet seductions of the senses. No one can tell the ultimate goal which one may reach by effort; but all can see the star that burns above one's head and strive towards its radiance until the day finally comes when, with aspirations all fulfilled, the man becomes the star, and disappears for ever from the plane of physical causes and lives in everlasting union with the absolute will. The conflict commences in sacrifice and ends in fruition. It is wearisome to the flesh, but rejuvenating to the spirit, and its victory makes the man a god.

Iko.

EDITORIAL NOTE.

CHANGE is the order of the day. Is not everything in transformation, and does not fashion and custom rule everywhere—even in the T. S.? Mr. Judge changed the name of *The Path*, and indicated its course under the new name. *Isis* gave way to *The Grail*; *Lucifer*, we see, also disappears in *The Theosophical Review*, and a hint has been given that *The Theosophical News* will undergo a change likewise. And the last change I have to announce is that regarding THE IRISH THEOSOPHIST. This number closes its fifth volume, and the last under that name. It has been decided, for the best interests of the work, in

Europe particularly, to amalgamate *The Grail* and THE IRISH THEOSOPHIST together under a new name. Dr. Coryn and G. W. Russell (Æ.) have consented to act as joint editors. The size will not be increased for at least six months. The magazine will be printed in Dublin under the skilful supervision of Miss Violet North, and the publishing will be carried on as before at Dublin and London. While other theosophical periodicals have adopted a form considered more suitable for the public, this new magazine will be adapted to the requirements of the steadily increasing number of Theosophists.

I hope the many friends in all parts of the world who, by their spontaneous expressions of appreciation and practical financial help, made the task involved in the editing, printing and publishing of THE IRISH THEOSOPHIST so pleasant and agreeable, will continue to extend their hearty support to the new venture, which certainly comes along bearing full freight of promise.

Subscribers to both *The Grail* and THE IRISH THEOSOPHIST will be sent *The Internationalist* until their subscription expires. The subscription to *The Grail* and THE IRISH THEOSOPHIST will be considered for this purpose equivalent in value. The price of the new magazine will remain at fourpence per copy post free.

D. N. D.

THE T. S. IN EUROPE (IRELAND).

13, EUSTACE STREET, DUBLIN.

OUR autumn session opens with a strain of sadness, for we will miss at our meetings the best President, the most kindly brother, and the hardest worker for the cause, our comrade Dunlop, who will be in America ere this appears. He has laughed and joked with us through nights of innumerable cigarettes and pipes and discussions and many intellectual battles; and yet we have never lost through familiarity the sense of the bright spirit behind, whose face shone at our public meetings, and with whose words seemed often to bubble up the sweet waters of immortality. They all go like that, one after another. O America, what a populous lodge this would be if you only restored us our own again!

The Wednesday evening meetings continue; and for the future, for those desirous of more wisdom and less hilarity, Friday evening will be set apart for the study of *The Secret Doctrine*.

ROBT. E. COATES, *Hon. Sec.*